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Finegold Alexander designs \$18.2 million renovation for Eliot Upper School: project team includes Colantonio and R.W. Sullivan

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Construction has begun on the \$18.7 million, 22-month renovation of the former North Bennet St. School, in the North End, for the future Eliot Upper School. Finegold Alexander is the project architect.

The project team includes Colantonio Inc, general contractor; Boston Building Consultants, structural engineer; R.W. Sullivan, MEP/FP engineer; Bryant Associates, civil engineer; McPhail Associates, geotechnical engineer; and R.F. Freel Associates, structural engineer for temporary shoring.

The Eliot Upper School project is the latest phase in Boston Public School's expansion plan for Eliot K-8 Innovation School, which has grown from 150 K-5 students in 2007 to 475 K-8 students in 2014.

"When I walked in here in 2010, Boston was losing students to private schools and charter schools," said Traci Walker Griffith, principal of the Eliot K-8 Innovation School. In the four years since, Walker Griffith has applied for, and been awarded, an innovation grant, and turned the Level 3 school into a Level 1 school. "In 2007, the school was struggling to get students in the door. Now we are admitting students by lottery only - with hundreds on the wait list for kindergarten."

The rapid success and growth of the Eliot K-8 Innovation School has spurred the need to expand the school through acquisition and renovation. The future Eliot Upper School will house fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth graders starting in the fall of 2016. The other two Eliot School locations – 16 Charter St. and 585 Commercial St. - will serve students in grades K-2 and 3-4.

Finegold Alexander is leading the design and construction of the Eliot Upper School project which involves the complete gut renovation and expansion of three connected buildings, while preserving their historic exteriors. New spaces will include classrooms, cafeteria and catering kitchen, computer labs, multi-purpose room, media center and offices for faculty and staff.

"The challenge with this project is that it is a historic building," said Nancy Goodwin, principal at Finegold Alexander. "It once housed a church circa 1823 that was added to in the 1870s to create a trade school for immigrant workers. Two adjacent townhouses are also included in the current school project. Because of the different uses and orientations, none of the floors in the buildings aligned, hence the gut renovation."

"The ultimate goal," said Goodwin, "is to provide flexible spaces to further the Eliot School's innovative mission and provide the students with the best possible environment in which to learn." The school will include large windows in all classrooms, efficient mechanical systems to provide immaculate indoor air quality, universal accessibility, and access to the latest technology in teaching, such as a robotics laboratory. "Another example of how we created a welcoming facility,"

states Goodwin, "is that the students, staff and visitors will now enter into a gracious lobby overlooking the double height multi-purpose space and, through glazed partitions, to the cafeteria."

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